

Testing and Treating Osteoporosis

To determine if you have osteoporosis or may be at risk for the disease, your doctor may ask you a series of questions about your lifestyle, medical and family history. Based on a comprehensive medical assessment, your doctor may then recommend that your bone mass be measured. A bone mineral density test is a specialized type of test that is accurate, painless and noninvasive.

This x-ray type test will measure bone density in various sites of the body. This is the only way to tell if you have osteoporosis. Since osteoporosis can develop undetected for decades until a fracture occurs, early diagnosis is important. A bone mineral density test can:

- Detect osteoporosis before a fracture occurs
- Predict your chances of fracturing in the future
- Determine your rate of bone loss and/or monitor the effects of treatment if the test is conducted at intervals of a year or more

Treating osteoporosis means stopping the bone loss and rebuilding bone to prevent breaks. Diet and exercise can help make your bones stronger but they may not be enough if you have lost a lot of bone density. If testing indicates you have osteoporosis, your physician may prescribe medications. Although there is no cure for osteoporosis, several medications have been approved by the Federal Drug Administration (FDA) for postmenopausal women to prevent and/or treat osteoporosis. Talk with your doctor to see if one of these might work for you.

Avoiding Falls

When your bones are weak, a simple fall can cause a broken bone. This can mean a trip to the hospital and maybe surgery. It might also mean an extended period confined to your bed or your home, especially in the case of a hip fracture. It's important to do all you can to prevent falls. Some things you can do are:

- Make sure you can see and hear well. Use your glasses or a hearing aid if needed.
- Ask your doctor if any of the drugs you are taking can make you dizzy or unsteady on your feet.
- Use a cane or walker if your walking is unsteady.
- Wear rubber-soled and low heeled shoes.
- Make sure all the rugs and carpeting in your house are firmly attached to the floor, or don't use them.
- Keep your rooms well lit and the floor free of clutter.
- Use nightlights.